

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, ELAB, BL
SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS ACTIVITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS
IN BOLIVIA

REF: LAPAZ 5013

1. POL/ECOM COUNSELOR HAD LONG DISCUSSION WITH GOB SUB-
SECRETARY OF PUBLIC HEALTH GASTOOOPONCE, WHO IS ALSO PRESIDENT
OF BOLIVIAN RED CROSS, AND LEONARD ISLER, REGIONAL DELEGATE,
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS, WHO IS IN BOLIVIA
ON A ROUTINE BI-ANNUAL INSPECTION. ISLER COINCIDENTALLY ARRIVED
IN BOLIVIA A FEW DAYS AFTER THE ARRESTS OF APPROXIMATELY 150
MINE LABOR LEADERS AND MINEWORKERS SO HE HAS HAD A CHANCE TO
VISIT ALL OF THESE PRISONERS AS WELL AS OTHER POLITICAL
PRISONERS IN BOLIVIA. ISLER SAID THAT ON HIS VISITS TO
BOLIVIA HE ALWAYS RECEIVES FULL COOPERATION FROM GOB AUTHORITIES
AND HAS HAD FREE AND OPEN ACCESS TO ALL PRISONERS WITHOUT THE
PRESENCE OF PRISON OFFICIALS. HE OPINED, IN FRONT OF PONCE,
THAT THERE IS NO SYSTEMATIC MISTREATMENT OR TORTURE OF POLITICAL
PRISONERS IN BOLIVIA OF THE NATURE OF CHILE OR URUGUAY,
ALTHOUGH PRISONERS OCCASIONALLY RECEIVE ROUGH
TREATMENT UNDER INTERROGATION.

2. DR. PONCE EXPLAINED THAT THE BOLIVIAN RED CROSS HAS
REGULAR ACCESS TO ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PROVIDES FOOD,
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CLOTHING, SUNDRIES, AND FACILITATES COMMUNICATIONS WITH

FAMILIES, ETC. PONCE SAID THAT FOLLOWING THE MILITARY OCCUPATION OF MINING AREAS, HE REQUESTED AND RECEIVED PERMISSION TO VISIT THE OCCUPIED MINES AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE RED CROSS AND THAT HE VISITED MOST MAJOR MINE AREAS AND SPOKE WITH FAMILIES AND MINEWORKERS AND VISITED HOMES. HE SAID THAT WHILE GOB FORCES DID DETAIN AND INTERROGATE MANY PEOPLE FOR SHORT PERIODS, THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF SERIOUS MISTREATMENT OR HARSH ACTS. SINCE THEN BOTH PONCE AND ISLER HAVE VISITED ALL FOUR PRISONS WHERE THE MINE WORKER DETAINEES HAVE BEEN HELD.

3. ISLER LATER TELEPHONED POL/ECOM COUNSELOR AND SAID THAT THERE IS ONE CASE OF TWO MISSING PERSONS, APPARENTLY MEMBERS OF AN EXTREME LEFTIST ORGANIZATION, AND THAT HE INTENDS TO RAISE THIS WITH THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR IN HIS EXIT INTERVIEW. THE PERSONS CONCERNED DISAPPEARED BEFORE THE RECENT TROUBLES WITH THE MINEWORKERS. ISLER REITERATED HIS VIEW, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS NONE OF THE SYSTEMATIC MISTREATMENT OF PRISONERS IN BOLIVIA WHICH EXISTS IN NEARBY COUNTRIES.

4. THE GOB HAS NOT OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED HOW MANY MINEWORKERS ARE STILL BEING HELD. IT ANNOUNCED THE EXILING TO CHILE OF 25 OF THOSE IN PRISON ON JULY 5. APPROXIMATELY 25 OTHERS HAD EARLIER BEEN EXILED. IT APPEARS THEN THAT PERHAPS SOME 100 MINEWORKERS REMAIN UNDER ARREST, WITH CHURCH OFFICIALS AND OTHER PRIVATE PARTIES CONTINUING TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE GOVERNMENT FOR THEIR RELEASE.

5. DR. PONCE ASKED THE POL/ECOM COUNSELOR WHETHER, IN LIGHT OF THE USG'S FORCEFULLY STATED INTERESTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS, WE WOULD BE WILLING TO ASSIST IN FURNISHING THE MODERNIZATION OF BOLIVIAN PRISON FACILITIES. SPECIFICALLY, HE MENTIONED THE GOB'S PLAN TO ESTABLISH A MODERN PRISON PLANT ON THE ALTIPLANO NEAR LA PAZ, WHICH WOULD INCLUDE A DRUG REHABILITATION CENTER. HE STATED THE PLAN IS STILL IN THE PRELIMINARY STAGES BUT THAT THE GOB MIGHT EVENTUALLY APPROACH THE US FOR ASSISTANCE.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE BEING ADVISED WHETHER THE US HAS ANY PROGRAMS FOR ASSISTING COUNTRIES TECHNICALLY AND FINANCIALLY WITH PRISON IMPROVEMENT,
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MODERNIZATION AND REFORM.
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